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Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf

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Elements of Newar Social Structure*

CHRISTOPH VON FÜRER-HAIMENDORF

AS THE CREATORS OF THE HISTORIC CIVILIZATION of the Nepal Valley the Newars have aroused the interest of orientalists ever since descriptions of the great Newar cities of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhatgaon first reached the western world. Early writers commented mainly on the Newars' remarkable achievements in the fields of architecture and domestic arts, but a more comprehensive account of Newar culture is contained in the famous work *Le Népal* by the French indologist Sylvain Lévi (1905). Opportunities for anthropological research in Nepal, on the other hand, did not arise until nearly half a century after Lévi's visit to Kathmandu, and thus it is only recently that data derived from literary sources can be supplemented by the results of field inquiries and direct observation.

Sylvain Lévi (1905, vol. I, pp. 220-2) put forward the hypothesis that the Newars had migrated to Nepal from 'regions north of the Himalayas', a view conflicting with the indigenous belief that the Newars have moved to the Himalayas from an earlier homeland in Southern India. There is no concrete evidence in support of either of these theories. No doubt immigrants from India as well as from Tibet have at times exerted a considerable influence on Newar culture, and some of them have ultimately been absorbed into Newar society, but there is every reason to believe that the bulk of the Newar people has been settled in the Nepal Valley since prehistoric times.

The classification of Newari, a language entirely distinct from Nepali, is still a matter of doubt. Though for several centuries Newari, and particularly literary Newari, has been subject to strong Sanskritic influences, its basic affinity with Tibetan and other languages of the Tibeto-Burman family is unmistakable. Similarities with Tibetan, however, do not extend to the structure of the verb, and this would seem to rule out any close genetic connection between the two languages.¹ Other languages of Tibeto-Burman affinities spoken in Nepal, such as Tamang, Sherpa, and Rai, are themselves not sufficiently known to permit comparisons with Newari.

The racial types represented among the Newars range from a Mongoloid type to one indistinguishable from the 'Mediterranean' type prevalent among North Indian populations. This diversity of physical features tallies with the tradition that at various periods in the history of the Nepal Valley immigrants from India were welcomed at the courts of the Newar kings and subsequently merged with the local population. Such immigrants, who seem to have come in comparatively small numbers, and adopted the Newars' language and customs, must not be confused, however, with those Brahman and Chetri immigrants who entered Nepal in large numbers at the time of the Muslim conquest of Northern India and whose Nepali-speaking descendants constitute today a population entirely distinct from the Newars.

The present paper is not intended to provide an historical hypothesis alternative to that of Sylvain Lévi, but to set out certain basic data on the structure of Newar society. It is the result of a preliminary ethnographic survey of parts of Eastern Nepal which my wife and I undertook in 1953. The data on the Newars were collected in the Nepal Valley and

*The fieldwork on which this article is based was greatly facilitated by a generous grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, to whose Directors I am deeply indebted.

¹The information regarding the nature of the Newari verb I owe to a personal communication from Professor Guiseppe Tucci.

the districts of Dulikhel, Charikot, Ramechap, and Okhaldhunga, and were checked with the help of Mr Upendra Man Malla, a Newar of Sheshyo caste from Kathmandu. More recently I obtained additional information from Mr Kaiser Lal Manandhar, Assistant for Newari in the School of Oriental and African Studies, and from Mr Purna Harsham Bajrachariya of the Government Museum at Kathmandu.

The range of my inquiries among the Newars was necessarily limited, for the principal aim of the pilot survey of 1953 was the collection of comparative data from diverse ethnic groups, and instead of concentrating on a single community I extended my inquiries to Sherpas, Tamangs, and Rais as well as to Newars, Chetris, and Brahmans. With the information thus gained it was possible to plan a programme of anthropological field research in Nepal to be carried out over a number of years, and within the framework of this programme Dr K. C. Rosser is now engaged in an intensive study of one of the minor Newar towns. He has used the present paper as a basis for his initial inquiries, and I am greatly indebted to him for his comments on several points of detail.

Distribution

The majority of the Newars lives in the Nepal Valley, where they form the numerically dominant ethnic element in the towns of Kathmandu, Patan, Bhatgaon, Thimi, Sankhu, Banepa, and Kirtipur. No figures for either Newars or any other ethnic group in Nepal are available, but as the total population of the Nepal Valley is under half a million, the number of Valley Newars is not likely to be more than 300,000. The number of Newars outside the Valley cannot be estimated with any accuracy. The largest and most important of the Newar towns are Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhatgaon. At one time in the history of the Valley each of these was the centre of a small kingdom and even today there are dialectal differences between the Newari of Kathmandu and that spoken in Bhatgaon and the villages previously ruled by the kings of Bhatgaon. The most striking feature of Newar civilization is its totally urban character. Even those Newars whose only occupation is agriculture live in urban style, and every Newar town contains numerous narrow streets of high, brick-built houses inhabited by farmers who toil all day in their fields.

Apart from the inhabitants of the Nepal Valley and its immediate vicinity, there are the so-called Hill Newars, who live in villages and small towns many days' journey from the centre of Newar civilization. Many of these settlements seem to be of comparatively recent origin, and are said to date from the time of the Gurkha conquest (A.D. 1768) when, after the defeat of the Newar kings, many Newars sought refuge in outlying districts. Other Newar colonies, however, such as the large trading communities in the towns of Bataul (Batwal), Palpa, and Dhankuta are almost certainly of older standing.

Traditionally trade has always played an important rôle in Newar economy, and today Newar expansion outside the Nepal Valley coincides with the flow of trade. The larger Newar settlements lie on or near the main trade routes, and in administrative centres, where Newar merchants cater for the needs of Government officials. From such provincial towns Newars have infiltrated into the surrounding countryside, and there are today many villages where the houses of Newars stand side by side with those of Parbatia Brahmans, Chetris, Tamangs, or Rais, and where Newars have acquired land and are now engaged in cultivation.

Many Hill Newars maintain contacts and marital relations with their home-towns in the Valley, and continue to speak the Newari dialect of the locality from which they emigrated. But others have lost touch with the Nepal Valley and long residence among speakers of other languages has resulted in the abandonment of Newari in favour of Nepali, also known as Gurkhali, the *lingua franca* of Nepal, which most Newars speak as a second language. Retention of the Newari language does not seem to be proportionate to distance

from Kathmandu, for in Okhaldhunga in Eastern Nepal, some twelve days' march from the Valley, there is a flourishing Newari-speaking community, whereas in Chitre, a village lying between Risingo and Those, some four days' march from Kathmandu, there are Newars who no longer speak or even understand Newari. It would thus seem that the change-over from Newari to Nepali does not impede intermarriage with families in Newari-speaking localities, provided the colonists have retained their caste status.

The altitude of the Nepal Valley is approximately 4,500 feet, and the settlements of Hill Newars lie generally at heights between 3,000 and 6,000 feet. But pressure of population at the preferred levels of altitude has recently led to an infiltration of Newars into higher country, and some isolated Newar colonies are found today at altitudes of 9,000 feet in close proximity to Sherpa villages.

The Stratification of Newar Society

A detailed analysis of Newar society is beyond the scope of this paper, and only a rough outline of the complex hierarchy can here be attempted. According to a Newar tradition quoted by Sylvain Lévi and widely believed by the more learned Newars, the present ranking of castes is based on a division of the Newar population into 64 occupational castes devised by a group of Brahman scholars in the time of Jaya Shtiti Malla. Though this tradition should certainly not be taken literally, it may well reflect a process of social change accelerated by the influence of Indian scholars and priests attracted to the Newar court, and the acceptance of Hindu ways of thinking by the ruling classes. By this process a predominantly Buddhist society would seem gradually to have assumed many features of the Indian caste-system in its more rigid mediaeval form. While we lack as yet the historic data which would enable us to trace this process in detail, the views of Newar scholars on the transformation of Newar society in this period contain probably a measure of truth. D. R. Regmi, for instance, writes: 'The caste system . . . got regularized and hardened in due course, and monasteries dying out produced the priest class of the Buddhist community; its monks easily turned into priests under the influence of Vajrayana ritualism. What Vajrayana started, Shaiva influence later on consolidated and hardened. . . . The chronicles speak of this process of consolidation and regularization in alluding to Jaya Shtiti Malla's contribution, and some eighty-five castes are mentioned in that connection to have taken shape. . . . This was the age when the casteless character of Buddhist society in general underwent a kaleidoscopic change and gave way to a rigid caste structure, which affected the mass of the people unlike such influences in the past touching only a fringe that was the aristocracy' (1952, pp. 171-2).

Today Newar society appears divided into a Buddhist and a Hindu section, and most of the earlier Western writers on Nepal have commented on the relative strength of these two categories of Newars. The Newars themselves, however, do not seem to regard the distinction between 'Buddhists' and 'Hindus' as constituting a major cleavage within their community, and in the Newari language there are no terms exactly corresponding to the words 'Buddhist' and 'Hindu'. When speaking to members of other communities Newars occasionally use the Nepali terms Bhoudik and Saivik, and it is not unlikely that the idea of a basic distinction between Buddhist and Hindu Newars arose only at a time when Hindus of Indian affiliations established themselves in the Valley, and some sections of Newars began to avail themselves of the services of Brahman priests. Orthodox Hindus, such as immigrant Chetris, would obviously regard such Newars as 'Hindus' whereas those served by a class of priests associated with the old Buddhist *vihara* or *baha* would appear to them as 'Buddhists'. The division into two sections has, however, never been clear cut, and this accounts perhaps also for the varying estimates regarding the relative strength of 'Buddhists' and 'Hindus'. B. H. Hodgson (1874, p. 64) considered that the Buddhists formed 'the vast majority of the

Newar race' and H. A. Oldfield (1880, p. 177) estimated them as constituting two-thirds of the population. But Chattopadhyay (1923, p. 522) mentions that under the rule of the Gurkhas the Hindus gained ground at the expense of the Buddhists, a statement which would seem to apply particularly to the prominent Sheshyo caste.

The flexibility of the categories 'Buddhist' and 'Hindu' Newars is conditioned by the dovetailing of ritual practices. Most of the important Hindu deities are recognized as 'protectors' of Buddha and his doctrine, and their cult forms part of the ritual performed at the great Buddhist shrines. Similarly Hindu temples are open to Buddhist worshippers, and at the great annual feasts Buddhist and Hindu Newars co-operate in the same ritual activities.

For the purposes of the present analysis we shall use a comparatively simple criterion in distinguishing between 'Buddhist' and 'Hindu' Newars. We shall regard as Buddhist all those castes whose family priests are Guwajus, whereas those castes who employ Brahmans as hereditary priests (*purohit*) for domestic rituals will be considered Hindus.

Both these sections of Newar society consist of a number of hierarchically arranged social and ritual groups, which correspond in many respects to the familiar pattern of the Indian castes. The members of a caste regard themselves and are regarded by others as a social entity; they employ family priests of the same rank, engage in similar ritual activities, and enjoy the same ritual and social privileges. A Newar caste is a commensal and normally endogamous group, made up of several exogamous clans or residential units, but we shall see presently that the principle of endogamy is not as strictly adhered to as in Indian caste societies.

The highest stratum of Buddhist Newar society is formed by a priestly caste known in Newari as Guwaju, but sometimes referred to by the Sanskrit term Vajra Achariya. Every Guwaju occupies the hereditary position of family-priest in relation to several households of clients belonging to one or more Buddhist castes. Though he may minister to their religious needs and receive payment for his services, he is not debarred from following another occupation and many Guwajus derive most of their income from the ownership of land.

Immediately below the Guwajus ranks the caste of Bare or Sakyabhikshu. Though inferior to Guwajus in their standing as ritual experts, Bares function as the priests of certain shrines and temples. Their main occupation, however, is gold- and silver-smith work, and most of the jewelry and the metal-work for which the Newars are famous is the product of Bare craftsmen.

Guwajus and Bares freely interdine, and where members of the two castes reside in the same quarters (*baha*) they co-operate in the performance of various ritual undertakings. The most important of these is an initiation ceremony known as *Bare shigu* (literally 'Making into Bare') which is performed once every seven years for all boys born of Guwaju and Bare parents of one residential quarter or *baha*. There can be no doubt that at one time the *Bare shigu* was a rite by which the candidates for membership of monastic communities were initiated into the life of *bhikshu* or religious mendicants. Even today the ceremony includes a rite whereby the senior Guwaju of the *baha* conducting the *Bare shigu* instructs the boys to collect alms in the manner of Buddhist monks and for four days sends them out of the *baha* on this ritual errand.

It is significant that in respect of the *Bare shigu* rite the Guwaju and Bare boys are treated as of one caste, and that, as the name of the rite suggests, the Guwajus too must be 'made into Bares'. At the end of this rite, however, the Guwaju boys undergo a second rite known as *Achariya bhishek*, in the course of which they are invested with the insignia of a priest, namely a *mokuth* (head-dress), a prayer bell, and a brass *vajra*, the thunderbolt symbolizing power. This investiture entitles the young Guwajus to direct ceremonies and worship in temples and to perform religious rites for their clients (*jajman*). While the *Bare shigu* rite

affirms the basic unity of Guwaju and Bare, the *Achariya bhishek* signifies the isolation of a higher and specifically privileged stratum within the caste-group formed by Guwajus and Bares.

In the minds of Newars of other castes the unity of Guwajus and Bares outweighs the distinction in ritual status, and some of my informants of different caste maintained that under certain exceptional circumstances a Bare learned in the scriptures and ritual observances might qualify for the role of Guwaju. This is denied by Guwajus, who hold that a Bare can never become a Guwaju. Like a member of any other clean caste he can, however, renounce the world and become a *bhikshu* or celibate monk. As such he shaves his head, wears a yellow robe, and can act as priest for the worship of Buddha and the protective deities, but – unlike Guwajus – he cannot perform the religious rites at any of the major ‘social’ *puja*, e.g. the *sraddha*.

The position of such celibate monks in present-day Newar society is somewhat problematic. The Newars themselves consider them as a comparatively recent phenomenon, which owes its origin to the influx of celibate monks from other Buddhist countries during the past three generations. Such newcomers, attracted by the fame of the Buddhist sanctuaries in the Nepal Valley, were given shelter in some of the *baha*, and a few religiously minded Newars followed their example in renouncing the world. While to the Newars celibate monks appear as a new development, historical sources leave no doubt that as long as Nepal was ruled by Buddhist kings, the Newar towns contained flourishing monastic institutions. Only with the introduction of Brahmanical Shivaism, ascribed by local tradition to the legendary Shankara, did the monasteries decline. Their transformation into quarters of married priests was hastened when in 1324 Harisimha conquered Nepal and established himself as the first Hindu king of the Valley. Yet Buddhism did persist among the Newars in a modified form, and, particularly in Patan, communities of celibate monks survived as late as the 17th century. How it is that Guwajus themselves have no recollection of a time when the *baha* were still *vihara* in the ancient sense is difficult to explain. Nor is it clear from which strata of Newar society the celibate inmates of the *vihara* were originally recruited. An endogamous caste-group of Guwajus and Bares can obviously have arisen only when the celibate monastic life had been abandoned.

Apart from the *Bare shigu* rite compulsory for every Bare and Guwaju boy, there is an optional initiation rite, which at the age of twelve or thirteen may be performed for boys of either caste. This rite, known as *dekha* (or *diksha*) *bigu*, is connected with the expenditure of considerable wealth, for it is incumbent on the fathers of the initiates to feast large numbers of guests for ten days. Only rich men can provide such large-scale entertainment, but less affluent men sometimes arrange to contribute according to their means to a *dekha bigu* ceremony performed on another’s behalf and thereby secure their son’s participation in the ceremony. *Dekha bigu* means literally ‘the giving of sacred formulae’ (*mantra*), and at the rite certain magical formulae are communicated to the candidates. While the *dekha bigu* rite does not convey on those initiated any special social status, it carries with it a certain prestige and entitles the initiate to participate in tantric observances.

Eligibility of both Guwajus and Bares for the *dekha bigu* reaffirms the essential unity of the two castes, and this has been recognized by H. A. Oldfield (1880, Vol. II, p. 139), who as early as 1880 wrote: ‘The difference of rank between the Vajra Acharya and the Bikshu . . . is merely of an official character and exists only on official occasions. Socially (they) . . . are on terms of perfect equality; they eat together and intermarry among each other. . . .’

This statement requires, however, some qualification. Marriages celebrated with full religious rites do not usually take place between Guwajus and Bares, but it is not uncommon for Guwajus and Bares to live in marital unions concluded with simplified rites, and women

married in this manner have for all practical purposes the same status as formally wedded wives. But whereas in the case of certain other inter-caste marriages the husband may not eat food cooked by a wife of lower caste, and the children inherit the caste status of the lower caste parent, no such restrictions are imposed on the domestic life of a Guwaju married to a Bare girl: his children, as also his wife, are accorded the ritual and social status of Guwajus, while conversely the children of a Guwaju girl and a Bare man inherit the lower caste status of their father.

Distinct from Guwajus and Bares and ranking lower in the caste hierarchy is a Buddhist community distinguished from all other Newar castes by its unusual origin. This is the Urhä community, a caste sprung from marital unions between Guwaju or Bare men and Tibetan women. Newar traders and artisans seem to have had establishments in Tibet for many centuries, and it appears that until recently the trade with Tibet was mainly in the hands of Guwajus and Bares.

Some of those settled in Tibet married Tibetan girls, and by an agreement between the governments of Tibet and Nepal the daughters of such marriages are reckoned as Tibetans, while the sons count as Urhäs and Nepalese. Urhäs who continue to live in Tibet customarily marry Tibetan women, but those who return to Nepal contract marriages with Newar girls of castes lower than Guwaju and Bare, and daughters from such marriages marry Urhä men resident in Nepal. Thus a substantial Urhä community has grown up in the Nepal Valley, and the number of Urhäs in Kathmandu alone is said to exceed two thousand. Many Urhäs, moreover, have two establishments, and are married to a Newar wife in Nepal and a Tibetan wife in Tibet.

For a long time Urhäs exercised a monopoly of the trade with Tibet, and they constitute an important colony in Lhasa, where Newars were the main metal-working and artisan community (Sylvain Lévi, 1905, Vol. I, p. 307). Trade with Tibet gave the Urhäs great wealth, but in recent years they have had to share this trade with other castes, particularly with the Sāmis, who, though originally a caste of oil-pressers, have now risen to importance in commerce.

Urhäs are not served by the same class of Guwajus who act as the family priests of all other clean Buddhist castes, but their ritual needs are ministered to by a special section of Guwajus, known as Urhä Guwajus. The status of these Urhä Guwajus is slightly lower than that of other Guwajus, and as they interdine with their Urhä clients they are excluded from commensality with other Guwajus and with Bares. Urhäs who have been to Tibet sometimes also employ Tibetan lamas for the performance of certain lamaistic rites, but such rites are unconnected with the obligatory social *puja* and hence there is no competition between lamas and Urhä Guwajus.

Inferior to Guwajus and Bares, but in an undefined position vis-à-vis Urhäs ranks the large caste of Sheshyo, known in Nepali as Shresta.¹ Most Sheshyos consider themselves Hindus and employ Brahman priests, but in Kathmandu there is still a fairly substantial Buddhist Sheshyo community served by Guwaju priests. The number of Buddhist Sheshyos in other localities is small, and I was told that particularly those Sheshyos who become rich have the tendency to change over to Hinduism.

There is, however, no sharp cleavage between Buddhist and Hindu Sheshyos. They can intermarry, and in the case of such 'mixed' marriages it is customary for the wedding rites to be performed by the family priest of the bridegroom and for the wife to follow the husband's religious practices.

Within the Sheshyo caste there are three sub-divisions of differential social status. In

¹Sheshyo is the colloquial Newari term, but in writing even Newars use the term Shresta as designation for the caste and in Nepali the term Shresta is used both colloquially and in writing.

Newari they are referred to as Sheshyo (a term which applies both to the whole caste and to its highest sub-division), Kota-Sheshyo, and Baga-Sheshyo, which means literally 'Half-Sheshyo'. These sub-divisions do not constitute sub-castes in the conventional sense, however, and it seems that a Sheshyo of medium rank will not refer to himself as Kota-Sheshyo though by others he may be described as being of Kota rank. The same applies to the Nepali terms Chhathari (= Sheshyo), Panchthari (= Kota-Sheshyo), and Charthari (= Baga-Sheshyo). Literally these terms mean 'Six Clans', 'Five Clans', and 'Four Clans', but may be translated as 'Grade Six', 'Grade Five', and 'Grade Four' (cf. p. 34). The Newars themselves do not seem to agree on the meaning of these terms, but an explanation has recently been suggested by the Nepalese historian Babu Ram Achariya.¹ According to his hypothesis the highest sub-division of Sheshyos consisted of the descendants of the Malla kings. The members of the royal house had married Rajput girls from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as well as local Newar girls, and while only the offspring of the Rajput wives were regarded as true Mallas, the sons from the other wives were given the name Singh. Together with the Mallas they formed an aristocratic group superior to the ordinary Sheshyos. Later in imitation of the aristocratic group of the Gurkhas, which consists of six clans, these superior Sheshyos called themselves 'Chhathari', although there were not six but more than forty clans among them, and they referred to the Sheshyos of the lower group by the meaningless term 'Panchthari'. It is not clear whether Babu Ram Achariya's hypothesis, which incidentally does not account for the existence of 'Charthari', is based on historical material not yet accessible to western scholars, or whether it is entirely conjectural. The way in which it is presented confirms, however, my view that the Newars themselves are in doubt about the original meaning of the terms 'Chhathari', 'Panchthari' and 'Charthari'.

Not only the internal stratification of the Sheshyos but also their position vis-à-vis other castes seem to be a very complex problem. While the Sheshyos of Kathmandu admitted unhesitatingly the superiority of Guwajus and Bares, those of the town of Sankhu told Dr Rosser that their status was higher than that of Guwajus and Bares, and that consequently no Shresta would take food from members of these castes. Only further research can show whether this attitude is the result of particular local conditions, or whether elsewhere too certain Sheshyos claim equality with the two highest castes.

Guwajus, Bares, Urhäs, and Sheshyos constitute the upper stratum of Buddhist Newar society. The broad middle stratum is formed by the large agricultural caste of Jyapu, which comprises, besides farmers exclusively engaged in the tillage of the soil, several occupational groups, such as, for instance, Kumhas (potters), known by their professional designation, but forming an endogamous sub-section of the Jyapu community.

Though economically and socially inferior to Sheshyos and Urhäs, the Jyapus are bracketted with these two castes in one ritual aspect: Guwajus and Bares will accept all food except boiled rice and *dhal* from Urhäs, Shrestas, and Jyapus, whereas from castes ranking lower, they do not accept any food boiled in water.

Below the Jyapus stands the caste of barbers known as Nau. Barbers enjoy certain ritual privileges, such as the use of drums in funeral processions, to which castes ranking higher, but not the artisan castes ranking below them, are entitled. This group comprises the castes of Duhin (quarriers of lime), Chhipa (dyers of cloth), Sämi (oil-pressers), Kou (blacksmiths), and Puñ (painters).

Though classed together from the point of view of the higher castes, these lower artisan communities, which must not be confused with the high-ranking Bare artisans, do not consider each other of equal status, nor do they accept boiled rice from each other's hands. The

¹I owe this information to Mr Upendra Man Malla, who kindly translated for me some of Babu Ram Achariya's articles published in Nepalese periodicals.

Sāmis, for instance, many of whom have acquired considerable wealth and have recently risen to high positions in government service, claim a social status higher than that of Chhipas or Kous, and this claim finds expression in their refusal to interdine with members of these castes. With the other artisans of this group of castes they share, however, the disability that barbers of Nau caste, though willing to cut their hair, will not pare their toe-nails, a service required by higher castes on certain ritual occasions.

Ritually and socially separated from the clean castes served by Guwaju family priests, is the large group of untouchable castes, and these in turn are divided into a group of superior status consisting of Nā (butchers) and Pore (fishermen), and a group of inferior status comprising Chami (sweepers) and Kulu (drum-makers). There is some doubt as to whether these untouchables, from whose hands neither Buddhists nor Hindus of clean castes accept water, should be reckoned as Buddhists or Hindus. For the Newars of the higher castes their affiliation to the one or other community is no problem of practical importance, for they are debarred from social intercourse and neither Guwajus nor Brahmans will act for them as priests. But from a detailed discussion of the views of such older authorities as Oldfield, Hodgson, and Hamilton contained in an essay by Chattopadhyay (1923, pp. 522-47) it appears that many of the lower Newar castes have for long been considered as 'mixed castes' or 'heterodox Buddhists', and the habit of the Nās to refer to their priests as Nā Guwajus suggests that the Nās themselves consider themselves linked with the Buddhist rather than with the Hindu community. Nā Guwajus are as untouchable as any other untouchable caste. While a 'pure' Guwaju will not minister at a Nā rite, Nās may pay him to perform on their behalf a rite in a sanctuary to which they themselves have no access.

The most exalted among the castes constituting the Hindu or Saivik section of the Newar people is that of the Deo Brahmans who acted as the family priests of the Malla Kings and still serve as the *purohit* of all Hindu Sheshyo clans. Their high position is reflected in the term of address *juju* (literally 'king') due to every Deo Brahman, and tradition tells that their ancestors came from Kannauj near Benares and that the Newar kings offered them many honours and privileges to attract them to Nepal. Today the caste furnishes the priests of most of the important Hindu temples, and there can be little doubt that Deo Brahmans played a vital part in establishing Hindu ritual and practices among the Newars. Though their facial features testify to their North Indian origin Deo Brahmans consider themselves as Newars and speak Newari among themselves.

Another caste of Newar Brahmans are the Jha Brahmans who trace their origin from Tirhut in Bihar. Their status is inferior to that of the Deo Brahmans with whom they neither intermarry nor interdine. Jha Brahmans do not as a rule, act as *purohit*, but are employed for the recitation of such sacred books as Ramayana and Mahabharata, which they read in Sanskrit and expound in Newari, as well as for certain minor ritual tasks. In their physical make-up Jha Brahmans are not easily distinguishable from Newars of other castes. They too speak Newari as their mother-tongue and regard themselves as Newars. Neither Deo Brahmans nor Jha Brahmans intermarry with the Nepali-speaking Parbatia or Hill Brahmans.

The core of that section of the Newar community which is served by Brahman priests and consequently described here as Hindu, is formed by the Sheshyos, a caste within whose higher ranks some of the Kshatriya immigrants of early days seem to have been absorbed. Certain Sheshyo clans of high social status still claim Indian origin. For instance, the Malla clan, which furnished the Kings of the Newar dynasties ruling before the Gurkha conquest, has the tradition of being descended from Rajput immigrants, and the Munsi clan, from which the Malla Kings recruited judges for their courts of law, traces its origin to Indian judges (*munsif*) invited to Nepal by some of its mediaeval kings.

The Sheshyos of lower status have no traditions of an Indian origin. Undoubtedly they

represent a section of the indigenous Newar population, which at the time when the influx of Brahmins and other high-caste Hindus gave Hinduism ascendancy over Buddhism, changed from Buddhist to Hindu practices without severing their links with traditional Newar society. A pointer to the one-time existence of a self-contained Newar society, in which even Sheshyos were not dependent on the ritual services of Brahmins, can be seen in the role of the Achariyas (or Achajus), a priestly Sheshyo clan. At certain family rites, and particularly those performed in the *agon*, the ritual centre of a lineage (cf. p. 25), the Sheshyos employ Achariyas and not Brahmins to act as sacrificial priests. The ostensible reason for the exclusion of the Brahmin priests from this site is the rule that no member of any community other than Newars may enter the *agon*.

Within the Hindu section of the Newars there are no specific artisan castes, and the only caste of low status which might be considered Hindu rather than Buddhist is that of the untouchable Jogis, who work as tailors and musicians.

Buddhist	Hindu
Guwaju Bare Urhä Sheshyo	Deo Brahman Jha Brahman Sheshyo
Jyapu Nau	
Duhin, Chhipa, Sämi, Kou, Puñ	
Nä Pore Chami Kulu	Jogi

The acceptance of the principle of caste by all sections of Newars indicates to how great an extent even those who consider themselves Buddhists share the Hindu view of society. None of the other Buddhist communities of Nepal, such as the Tamangs and Sherpas, are organized on caste-lines, nor do these communities have any feeling regarding interdining and even intermarriage with members of other communities. Among the Newars, on the other hand, Buddhists are as pollution-conscious as Hindus, and the maintenance of caste status is a common preoccupation of all Newars of clean caste.

As every Newar caste forms a more or less autonomous unit, social controls operate mainly within the caste, and there is today no specifically Newar authority system which cuts across caste-lines. Such an authority system undoubtedly existed in the days of the Newar kings, but the political control exerted during the last two hundred years by the Gurkha kings and their hereditary Rana prime ministers, has shifted the centre of power to a point outside Newar society.

THE STRUCTURE OF NEWAR CASTES

After two centuries of Gurkha rule, the Newar pattern of society is nowadays found only at caste-level, and in the following pages we shall analyse the internal organization of several

individual caste groups. Though certain principles of caste-organization operate among both higher and lower castes there are so many significant differences that the major caste-groups must be treated separately.

If we begin with the two closely allied castes of Guwajus and Bares, we find the community vertically divided into a large number of residential units known in Newari as *baha* and in Nepali as *bihar*. The latter word is derived from the Sanskrit word *vihara*, and there is no doubt that the present *baha* have developed from community dwellings of celibate Buddhist monks. Every *baha* contains one or more shrines where its members worship, but in the main the *baha* buildings, usually constructed in the form of a quadrangle enclosing a courtyard, serve residential purposes. The inhabitants of a *baha* are exclusively Guwajus and Bares; one *baha* may be occupied by members of one or of both castes, and in some *baha* all Bare residents practise the same craft. The oldest man of a one-caste *baha* acts as headman or *thakali*, but in mixed *baha* each community has its own *thakali*.

The spread of Newars to areas outside the Nepal valley, and the expansion of the three main towns in recent years, has modified the character of the *baha* as a strictly residential unit. Today many Guwajus and Bares no longer dwell in their *baha* quarters, but they retain nevertheless their ritual and social affiliations with their *baha* and continue to be known as its members. Though ideally a *baha* constitutes an exogamous unit, in some *baha* of very large membership the rule of exogamy has been relaxed and marriage within the *baha* is permitted if bride and groom can trace no common ancestry in the male line within seven generations. An example of such an overgrown *baha* is the Kwa *baha* of Patan which is said to comprise over 1,600 male members. There is no bar to a man's marriage with a girl of his maternal *baha*, provided no consanguineous link can be traced within a depth of five generations. Though the celibate members of a monastic community centred in a *vihara* obviously cannot have been linked by kinship ties, the Guwajus and Bares of today believe that all the members of a *baha* are descended from a common ancestor. While such common descent is of a purely fictional character and no member can trace his or her descent as far back as the putative common forefather, there are within each *baha* several genealogically demonstrable agnatic lineages with a depth of not less than five generations, and these are known as *phuki*. The members of a *phuki* form the primary ritual unit concerned with the cult of the tutelary deity of the *baha*, namely the *digu deo*, and its composition is thus identical with a ritual unit known as *digu puja guthi*. Though the term *phuki* refers to a kinship relation, and the term *digu puja guthi* to a ritual organization, for practical purposes the two terms can be considered interchangeable. The primary sense of the term *guthi* is the feast celebrated jointly by all the *guthiar* or members of the *guthi*, and in a secondary sense the term *guthi* is used for the social unit constituted by all the *guthiar*.

The organization of the *guthi* concerned with the cult of the *digu deo* will be described in greater detail in connection with the Sāmi community of Kathmandu, on which I have more data than on either Guwajus or Bares. In this context, it may be mentioned, however, that where a *baha* includes Guwaju as well as Bare members the same *digu deo* is revered by both castes. But as each community is divided into separate *digu puja guthi*, Guwajus and Bares never combine for the worship of their *digu deo*.

The agnatic lineages constituting a *digu puja guthi* and, to an even greater extent, the *baha*, act in many respects as autonomous bodies. Among the Guwajus of each of the major towns there is however a central caste authority which exercises control over the entire Guwaju community. This authority is vested in one lineage known as Raj Guwaju, and the most senior man of this lineage acts as head of the Guwaju caste within the confines of the town. Any dispute arising among the local Guwajus is reported to the Raj Guwaju, and once a year he and the heads of all *baha* meet in a house previously agreed on and discuss

all outstanding cases. When a decision has been taken, the Raj Guwaju pronounces judgement in the name of the assembled *baha* heads. This annual meeting is known as *Acharya guthi*. If during the year the Raj Guwaju wishes to consult the *baha* heads about a case of particular urgency or seriousness, he may call them to his own house or to the house of the royal Kumari, the girl regarded as the personification of the goddess Kumari, the daughter of Mahadeo. The Kumari, though usually a small girl too young to have any understanding of the issues involved, must be present at such a meeting and play the role of divine witness.

The authority of the Raj Guwaju is vested not in an individual but in a lineage, which in Kathmandu comprises over one hundred male persons. In theory any of these men may act as arbitrator of disputes. Ordinary complaints are reported to the *baha* of the Raj Guwaju, and it is left to the discretion of the senior members of the Raj Guwaju family to decide which of them should take up the case and attempt a settlement. Diffusion of authority or ritual privilege among the members of a lineage is a phenomenon prevalent in similar situations among certain Indian communities, but the actual working of the system is a point which calls for more intensive research. I have no information as to whether the Raj Guwaju and the assembly of *baha* headmen can exert authority over *baha* members who are permanently resident outside the valley. That such persons remain ceremonially linked with their ancestral *baha* is demonstrated by the custom of bringing their sons at least once in childhood to the ancestral *baha* for the *Bare shigu* rite. Participation in this ceremony entitles a man to membership of his paternal *baha*, while omission of this rite results in forfeiture of status in the society of his home-town. How far ritual and social status in *baha* society is linked with recognition of the authority of the *baha* heads and the Raj Guwaju is also a question that needs further investigation.

The Guwajus and Bares consider this insistence on the performance of the *Bare shigu* ceremony in their traditional *baha* as the custom that clearly distinguishes them from the Sheshyos, for whose sons the corresponding initiation rite, known as *kayita puja*, may be performed in any place. The distinction is important. While the Guwajus retain, wherever they may reside, a permanent link with their ancestral *baha*, Sheshyos can cut themselves off from the society of the Nepal Valley, without suffering loss of ritual or social status.

As we have seen, many *baha* comprise both Guwaju and Bare members, but in others only families of the one or the other caste reside. It is said that in olden times Urhäs lived in *baha* on equal terms with Guwajus and Bares, but that later they moved to other quarters, and relinquished their claim to *baha* membership.

Among the Sheshyos we do not find residential units comparable to *baha*; Sheshyo society is organized according to a system of exogamous patrilineal clans, each of which is known by a separate name such as Malla or Munsî. These clans are sometimes referred to by the Nepali term *thar*, but there seems to be no Newari word in current use for such agnatic, maximal lineages, though some of these were described to me as consisting of a single *phuki*. Clans of identical name are found in more than one town, and there is no ban on the marriage of persons bearing the same clan-name who reside in different towns.

The members of a Sheshyo clan inhabiting one locality – or in some cases perhaps only those of the same *phuki* – have a ritual centre known as *agon*, a house in which the heirlooms and ritual objects of the *phuki* are kept, and where on certain occasions its members assemble for worship. All those entitled to worship at the same *agon* consider themselves the descendants of a common male ancestor and form a primary exogamous unit.¹

In the social organization of the large agricultural caste of Jyapus the residential principle is almost as clearly expressed as among Guwajus and Bares. The basic unit is a patrilineal kin-group inhabiting a compact quarter with a ritual focus known as *noni*. The *noni*

¹Nowadays there are, however, some Sheshyo clans which have no *agon*.

is a shrine, usually situated in the courtyard of a quadrangle which is in some respects comparable to a *baha*. The idol in the *noni* is usually that of Bhagwan Buddha and only the members of the kin-group belonging to this *noni*, and residing in the surrounding houses, are entitled to enter the shrine. The members of the *noni* constitute a closely integrated social unit, the cohesion of which is reinforced by ritual rights and obligations, as well as by the solidarity springing from common residence.

Apart from clusters of agnatically linked families centred in a *noni*, there are larger residential units or quarters known as *tol*, each of which contains several *noni*. It is doubtful, however, whether the *tol* are specific features of any particular caste, or even of Newar society. For *tol* are found not only in Newar towns, but also in the villages of other populations, and much suggests that the word *tol* simply designates a spatial unit without primary social implications. In the small Newar town of Nala, for instance, I counted fifteen *tol*, some of which were inhabited by one caste, while others contained members of several caste groups. Five of these *tol* were inhabited only by Sheshyos, one by Sheshyos and Jyapus, one by Sheshyos and Chhipas, one by Sheshyos and Naus, one by Sheshyos, Sämis, Duhins, and Kumhas, one by Sheshyos, Kumhas and Näs, one by Sheshyos, Kumhas and Jogis, one by Damais, one by Pores, and one – situated slightly outside the town precincts – by Bares. Although the Sheshyos form the principal population of Nala, the division into *tol* did not coincide with that of the Sheshyos into clans, but one clan occurred in several *tol*, while conversely in some *tol* there were Sheshyos belonging to several different clans.

My information on Guwajus, Bares, Sheshyos and Jyapus does not extend to the details of the internal organization of any of these castes, but inquiries into the structure of the Sämi community of Kathmandu revealed a pattern, the principle of which seems to be characteristic of Newar social organization in general.

The Sämis, known in Nepali as Manandhar, were originally a caste of oil-pressers, and their caste-organization still relates to their concentration in the neighbourhood of commonly owned oil-presses (*sah*). In Kathmandu, for instance, there were originally seven oil-presses, and the localities where they were situated as well as the social units formed by the groups which owned these oil-presses are still known as *sah*. Today, however, only three of these localities still contain oil-presses, and many members of the individual *sah* no longer live in their ancestral localities.

The names of the original seven *sah* are Dai *sah*, Phukdhyan *sah*, Tanlachi *sah*, Lak *sah*, Nhu *sah*, Otu *sah*, and Chosan *sah*. In addition to these there are several *sah* known to have split off from the one or other of the original *sah*; the Phalcha *sah*, for instance, is regarded as a recent off-shoot from the Dai *sah*. Some of the *sah*-names refer to localities, and the Lak *sah* is so called because it was established by a Malla king near the palace (*laku*) in connection with gifts of oil to be presented regularly to Kumar Devi. At one time the Lak *sah* was involved in a dispute with the other *sah* over the performance of ritual duties, and this quarrel led to a boycott by all the other Sämis of Kathmandu which forced the members of the Lak *sah* to find marriage partners among the Sämis of Patan and Bhatgaon.

The Dai *sah* has the tradition that King Pratap Malla married a girl of this *sah*, and presented her with many pieces of land, which later passed to her kinsmen. The Chosan *sah* too is believed once to have been involved in a royal alliance which – surprisingly, in view of the difference in status – was brought about by the marriage of a Malla princess to a member of the *sah*. Her descendants still have the right to attend an annual feast given by the Thakurju family, now ranking as Sheshyo, on the grounds that this is their 'maternal uncle's' family.

The oldest man of each *sah* is known as *thakali* and as such holds a position of dignity and respect. But the leader of the *sah* in all practical matters is an official called *kaji*. In theory

the *koji* is elected by the members of the *sah*, but in practice the post usually goes to the senior man of a lineage which traditionally furnishes the *koji*.

From among the *koji* of the individual *sah*, one man is elected as caste-head of all the Sāmis living in Kathmandu. At present this post is usually held by the *koji* of the Dai *sah*, the wealthiest *sah* of the town, and this caste-headman is known as *mu-koji*. He may not hold the office of caste-headman simultaneously with the headship of his own *sah*, and hence that post is occupied during his term of office by the member of his lineage next to him in seniority. The election to the office of *mu-koji* takes place every seven years, but it seems that at present it is a more or less foregone conclusion that the Dai *sah* furnishes the *mu-koji*.

Another caste-official is the *nayo*, a man appointed to lead the musicians and singers, who provide the music at festivals and religious dances. He may be one of the *sah*-headmen, and as such already a member of the caste-council, or he may owe his appointment to his ability as a musician and organizer.

The council exercising ultimate authority over all the Sāmis of Kathmandu is known as *Shingu guthi*. It is composed of the *mu-koji*, who acts as chairman, the *nayo*, and the *koji* of the individual *sah*. A dissident group of Sāmis, recruited from several *sah*, has in recent years broken away from this caste-council, but the split may be only temporary, and hence I shall not refer to it in the following description of the caste organization.

The caste-council or *Shingu guthi* meets whenever caste-affairs have to be discussed or decisions taken. Once a year the Sāmis of Kathmandu express their solidarity at a public function at the Buddhist sanctuary of Soyambu, at which the *Shingu guthi* and many Sāmi householders outside the council join in a common act of worship and a communal feast.¹ The preparations for this feast are divided among the seven original *sah*: the men of Dai *sah* look after finance and accounting, those of Phukdhyan *sah* arrange for drink, those of the Tanlachi *sah* are responsible for the cooking of the food, those of the Lak *sah* for the serving of the meal and the procurement of curd, those of Nhu *sah* for the purchase and cutting up of the meat, those of the Otu *sah* for the provision of beaten rice, and those of the Chosan *sah* for the purchase of vegetables.

While the *sah* are the constituent segments of the Sāmi community of Kathmandu, each *sah* is made up of a number of social units, ideally representing lineages of varying span descended from one male ancestor. First among these stands a unit comprising all persons who belong to the same *noni*. The members of a *noni* claim descent from a common ancestor and worship at a shrine, known as *noni-chi*, which is sacred to Bhagwan Buddha or one of the protective deities. The ritual obligations of *noni*-members include the annual participation in a joint act of worship at one of the public temples, and the rites connected with all such celebrations are performed by a Guwaju, who is the hereditary *noni*-priest. Sāmis leaving the valley can remain members of their *noni*, provided they return periodically to Kathmandu and participate at the principal *noni*-feasts.

While in some *sah*, e.g. the Otu *sah*, there are only two *noni*, in other *sah* there are several *noni*, and these are again sub-divided into a number of *phuki* or lineages with a depth of not less than five generations. Whereas the common descent of *noni*-members is a matter of tradition, every *phuki*-member can normally trace his genealogical relationship with any other member of his *phuki*. Exceptions to this rule occur only if the smallness of a *phuki*, resulting from many untimely deaths, a preponderance of female births over several generations, or the childlessness of several members, delays segmentation beyond the span of time during which genealogical links are normally remembered.

The ritual centre of a *phuki* is the *wanjala*, a house which corresponds in some respects

¹My information does not extend to the Sāmis of other towns and I do not know whether their annual celebrations also take place at Soyambu or at some other place of worship.

to the *agon* of the Sheshyos. The *wanjala* contains a collection of ancient weapons, such as swords, *kukri*, and bows and arrows, but no fire-arms. These are regarded as the joint-property of the *phuki*, and it is likely that in the days of Newar independence they were available for use in the event of war. Today their purpose is merely ritual, and new weapons are no longer added to the *wanjala* collections. An inner room of the *wanjala* contains a statue of a goddess known as *Agon deo*, as well as the statues of one male and one female attendant. It is considered so sacred that access to it is limited to the Guwaju priest officiating at the annual ceremony and the two persons responsible for the current and the previous year's ceremonial.

The oldest male *phuki*-member functions as *phuki*-headman (*thakali*), and the senior *phuki*-headman of a *noni* acts as the head of the community centred in the *noni-chi*. Succession to this, as to most offices in Newari society, is by seniority according to birth order. The head of a *noni* is not necessarily succeeded by the man who takes his place as head of his own *phuki*, unless the new *phuki* head happens to be senior in years to the other *thakali* of all the *phuki* constituting the *noni*; it is more probable that at the death of a *noni* headman belonging to say *phuki* A, the *thakali* of *phuki* B or C will be the most senior in years and as such succeed to the headship of the *noni*.

The *phuki* as the social and ritual unit responsible for the cult of the *digu deo* is often referred to as *digu puja guthi* (Newari) or *devali guthi* (Nepali). On an average such a unit consists of five to ten joint families. Its members co-operate in many acts of worship, assist one another in the performance of marriage ceremonies and funeral rites, and observe birth- and death-pollution for each other.

The deity revered by the *phuki* members as their *digu deo* is usually one of the divinities of the Buddhist pantheon, but all the *phuki* of one *sah* do not necessarily worship the same tutelary deity. Attached to each *digu deo* is a Hindu deity in the role of 'protector', and whereas only vegetarian offerings are tendered to the *digu deo*, sacrifices of goats or sheep may be given to the protective deity.

While stone or metal statues of the Buddhist deity functioning as the *digu deo* of a *guthi* may be found in temples and shrines, the main annual *puja* of the *guthi* is performed at a group of crude stones situated near a field belonging to the *guthi*. These stones, which only in exceptional cases are fashioned into images, represent the *digu deo*, the two attendants, and the protective deity. Since much of the land outside Kathmandu, which previously belonged to Newars, was taken over by the Rana government, many *digu deo* stones stand today in such public places as the parade ground or the court-yards of government buildings. Even in the grounds of the royal palace there are *digu deo* stones, and the members of the respective *guthi* enjoy the special privilege of entering the grounds at the time of the *digu deo* feasts.

To have a *digu deo* and an ancestral place of worship connected with the deity's cult denotes undisputed status in traditional Newar society. Persons of mixed parentage, such as for instance the offspring of unions of Newars with Chetris or other non-Newars, though otherwise assimilable to Newar society, can claim no *digu deo* of their own. At the time of the *Siti Nakha*, the last feast of the festival season in the month of Baisak, they perform an act of worship simply described as *deo puja* at any public temple close to their residence, but this ritual carries with it none of the social implications of the *digu deo puja*.

While at the sanctuary of the *digu deo* traditionally situated on wasteland near the fields there is usually no image, the *digu puja guthi* usually possess a small gold or gilded idol of the *digu deo* for use at the *digu deo puja*, and this is kept in the house of the *guthi thakali*. At the time of the seasonal feasts this idol is placed on the stone representing the *digu deo*. If fission takes place in the *digu puja guthi*, a process periodically resulting from the natural growth of lineages, the idol is given in charge of the *thakali* most senior in years, from whom the *thakali* of the

guthi segments are entitled to borrow it whenever they perform a rite in honour of the common *digu deo*.

Most *digu deo* are the nominal owners of land donated to the deity by *guthi*-members intent on acquiring thereby merit and social prestige. Among the Sāmis it is customary to let out such land and to use the income for *guthi* purposes, whereas Jyapus usually cultivate their *digu deo* land jointly and set aside the produce to be consumed at *guthi*-feasts.

The joint preparation and consumption of meals, preceded as a rule by an act of worship, is, among the Newars, one of the principal means of giving ritual expression to the solidarity of a social group, and feasts of this type are held periodically at the level of *baha*, *sah*, *noni*, and particularly *digu deo guthi*. Indeed the main ritual manifestations of the *digu deo guthi* are connected with three annual feasts celebrated in the months of Baisak (April-May), Phagun or Chait (February-March or March-April), and Badra (August-September). The responsibility for the arrangements of these feasts falls in turn to each *guthi*-member and though all *guthiar* contribute, the 'donor' of the feast provides at his own expense such ritual necessities as flowers and incense.

Each *guthi*-member's turn to act as donor is regulated by his position on the *guthi*-roll, i.e. according to age. At the last feast of the annual festival season two shares of food more than there are members present are served; one is offered to the *digu deo*, and the other the donor gives to the *guthiar* next to him on the membership roll. Acceptance of this share denotes acceptance of the responsibility to undertake the preparations for the three feasts in the coming year.

Should a donor designate die before discharging this obligation, his eldest son or even his widow must arrange for the feasts and provide for the expenditure. Thereafter a son takes his normal place on the roll of *guthiar*, and it may be that his normal turn to act as donor at the *guthi*-feasts will come within a few years. Such an early recurrence of the obligation may be a considerable burden on a poor man, for although *guthi*-funds – and particularly the income from *guthi*-land – are placed at the disposal of the man responsible for the *guthi*-feast, he may have to find a considerable sum from his own pocket and many a poor man has had to mortgage his house when his turn came to discharge his duty to the *digu puja guthi*.

Even greater is the financial burden of arranging for the annual communal feast of the *sana guthi*, which comprises all the members of a *sah*. Four to five hundred rupees is the usual contribution which must be made by the donor of this feast; the large membership of the *sana guthi*, however, ensures that this responsibility has only to be met once in a life-time.

There is no limitation on the number of householders that may belong to a *digu puja guthi*, but there is among the Sāmis the general rule that this type of *guthi* should comprise only the descendants of an ancestor four generations removed from the youngest full member. In the next generation the *digu puja guthi* normally splits into as many segments as the common ancestor had sons with surviving male descendants.

Fission in the *digu puja guthi* is thus a normal process occurring once in every generation at the time when young men separate from their fathers' households, and as independent householders gain the right to full membership in the *guthi*. It results in the division of *guthi* property between the segments, and in the appointment of the senior segment members as *thakali* of the new *guthi*.

Though normally a *digu puja guthi* consists only of kinsmen, in exceptional circumstances a member of another lineage within the *sah* or even a Sāmi from another town may be admitted to membership, thereby being accorded the status of a 'blood relation' by courtesy. On being granted admittance, he must undertake to act as the donor of the feasts in the year following his admittance. Consequently, at the next feast, he is given the extra share set aside for the donor designate, and the expenditure he will have to incur counts as a kind

of admission fee. Once he has discharged this initial duty, he takes his place on the roll of *guthiar* according to his age.

A newly married woman gains admission to her husband's *digu puja guthi* by paying an entrance fee consisting of one goat, one pot of curd, and one silver coin. Before the *guthi*-feast one month's notice of her intention to join must be given by a woman's husband or father-in-law. Should a woman die before her formal admission to her husband's *guthi* his *guthiar* will not observe mourning, and as long as a woman has not been admitted to her husband's *guthi* the latter's *guthiar* are under no obligation to pay a ceremonial visit on the birth of a child.

At the time of the worship of the *digu deo* a circle is drawn round the sacred stones and those wives of *guthi* members who have not formally joined the *guthi* must watch the performance of the *puja* from outside the circle.

For every new born child of either sex, a father pays an entrance fee to his *digu puja guthi*. Payment of this fee entitles a child to associate membership; only married men who are independent householders are entitled to full *guthi* membership and placed on the roll of the *guthiar*.

The *digu puja guthi* is the primary instrument for the exercise of social controls. Violations of caste-rules that result in ritual pollution are above all the concern of the offender's *guthi*-members, for a polluted person's continued participation in *guthi*-feasts would directly affect the prestige and status of the entire *guthi*. Offences which render a man liable to expulsion from the *guthi* include acceptance of cooked food from members of lower and particularly of untouchable castes, marriage within the prohibited degrees of kinship, and marriage with a girl of untouchable caste. A man marrying a girl of lower, but clean caste, may, however, remain a *guthi*-member as long as he does not eat rice cooked by his wife; neglect of this precaution results in expulsion from the *digu puja guthi* and loss of caste status. Expelled from his own *digu puja guthi* and hence from his own caste, a man may try to join a *guthi* of his wife's caste, though not that of his wife's father, because the members of a *digu puja guthi*, who normally stand to each other in a relationship of agnates, may not include affines.

Expulsion from the *guthi* may also result from technical offences against *guthi* discipline, and in such circumstances it does not involve automatic loss of caste-status. Non-payment of *guthi*-contributions, failure to attend the funeral of a *guthi*-member, or refusal to act as donor of a *guthi*-feast at the customary period are reasons for a man's expulsion from his *digu puja guthi*, but expulsion on such grounds does not preclude his admittance to the *digu puja guthi* of an agnatically related lineage of his own *sah*.

All expulsions from a *digu puja guthi* must be resolved by a majority of *guthiar*; as long as the individual *guthi* exert their authority in maintaining the traditional social order, the councils of *sah* and caste do not occupy themselves with the trial of caste offences.

Among the Buddhist castes there is within each *digu puja guthi* an inner core known as *shi-guthi*. This *guthi* consists of neither more nor less than seven members, whose main responsibility is to arrange for the cremation of deceased *guthi*-members, to watch over the burning of corpses, and to see that bodies are properly reduced to ashes. Usually it is the seven senior members of a *digu puja guthi* who constitute the *shi-guthi*. But membership is not compulsory; a man eligible on grounds of seniority can refuse to accept this obligation and members of a *shi-guthi* are free to resign at all times.¹

¹The *shi-guthi* of the Sheshyos are of an entirely different nature. They are large, voluntary associations of persons whose only obligation is participation in the funeral procession of any deceased member. The preparation of the corpse and the cremation is not done by fellow caste-members, but by a sub-caste of Jyapus serving as professional undertakers. Sheshyos of high and low status may be members of the same *shi-guthi*, for funeral feasts do not involve attendance at a meal at which rice is served, but only at light refreshments of which Sheshyos of all sub-divisions may partake without danger of pollution.

In all the social units so far discussed descent is traced through the male line; membership of *baha*, *sah*, *noni*, and *phuki* is without exception that of a patrilineage – real or fictional – of varying span. This is not so, however, in a unit known as *bhochhi* (Newari) or *tsulai* (Nepali). At first sight a *bhochhi* might be mistaken for a segment of a *phuki*, but on closer scrutiny the *bhochhi* reveals itself as being of very different configuration. A *bhochhi* has a maximal depth of four generations, but as *bhochhi*-membership passes through the female as well as the male line its span is far greater than that of the *phuki*.

Ideally a *bhochhi* consists of a man and his wife, their sons and daughters, their sons' wives, their sons' children, their daughters' children, their grandsons' wives, and their unmarried great-grandchildren. The solidarity of the *bhochhi* finds ritual expression in a number of feasts at which all its members assemble; such occasions are attended by the daughters of the *bhochhi*-head and their children, but not by their husbands.

The rights of *bhochhi*-members are also expressed in the custom that on certain occasions, and particularly after the Durga *puja* and the Kora *jatra*, every member of a *digu puja guthi* must entertain all other *guthi* members together with their *bhochhi*. This mutual feasting of *guthiar* and their consanguineous kinsmen and affines is inaugurated by a dinner given by the *guthi thakali* to *guthi*-members and their *bhochhi*. This is followed by a similar dispensation of hospitality on the part of the *guthiar* next in seniority, and is continued through the whole of the roll of *guthi*-membership. Such mutual feasting is called *nakhtya* and as every Newar is a member of several *bhochhi*, namely that of his father, that of his mother's father, and, in the case of a woman, that of her husband, the entertainment to ceremonial meals during the festive seasons extends over a period of two months.

A *nakhtya* meal may entail the feeding of as many as a hundred persons, and imposes on the donor a considerable financial strain. Indeed it is said that the inability to fulfil the numerous social obligations of this type has forced many Newars to emigrate from the Valley and settle in distant villages. A recent enquiry into the economic position of the Newars of Kathmandu made by a Newar organization has revealed that some Newar families spend on the entertainment of guests about ten times the amount normally spent on the food consumed by the members of their household. If this figure is even approximately correct it suggests the prevalence of a system of reciprocal rights to hospitality which amounts to a pooling and common consumption of food-resources by social units comprising a very large number of primary families. For the Newar, who occasionally has to entertain dozens of kinsmen to a meal in his house, is in return invited together with his family to dozens of meals in the houses of others.

That this system of mutual entertaining, which links the consumption of food with the striving for prestige, leads sometimes to extravagance is brought out by the Nepali proverb:

Newar bigranchha bhosle The Newar is ruined by entertaining (i.e. by the giving of feasts),
Chetri bigranchha mosle The Chetri is ruined by merry-making (i.e. by gambling and drinking).

Smaller than the *bhochhi* is the social unit known as *machachhi*; *machachhi* means literally 'a mother and her children', but it is generally used to designate the primary family consisting of a married couple and their children. In a formal invitation, whether conveyed by a messenger or in writing, it is usually explicitly stated whether it is intended to invite only the head of the household, or whether the members of his *machachhi* or of his *bhochhi* are also invited.

Another term applied to the primary family is *kovo*. *Kovo* means literally 'part' and is applied to the individual married couples which either form part of a joint family, or have recently set up separate households. Thus it will be said that in the extended family of a man who has three married sons there are three *kovo* of the younger generation. Married daughters

and their husbands and children are not referred to as *kovo* in relation to their father's family, but the term is used for the families of married sons irrespective of whether partition of property has been effected or whether they remain constituent parts of the joint family.¹ Within the joint family household duties are organized on the basis of the constituent *kovo*, daughters-in-law undertaking in turn such tasks as cooking.

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

Apart from the *phuki* or *digu puja guthi* which, based on agnatic kinship, form the fundamental ritual and social units of Newar society, there are various associations also known as *guthi*, membership of which is not determined by birth, but is open to any person acceptable to those whose company he wishes to join.

Such *guthi* are voluntary associations of persons of the same caste, or – more rarely – of different castes, formed for the joint performance of certain ritual or economic tasks. The size of such *guthi* is not subject to limitation. Some optional *guthi* have as many as five hundred members, while others consist of a dozen householders. The most common types of voluntary *guthi* are those providing for the joint performance of a specific religious rite, but there are also *guthi* founded for the co-operation in some public work, such as the repair or maintenance of a temple. *Guthi* of such nature usually owe their establishment to a donation of agricultural land, the income from which serves to meet the expenditure of an annual feast attended by all *guthi*-members.

In every voluntary *guthi* there are office-bearers as well as ordinary members. Normally the oldest *guthiar* acts as headman (*thakali*), and in most *guthi* there is also a messenger (*pala*) who is appointed annually and whose task it is to communicate the instructions of the *thakali* to the *guthiar*, and to announce to all members such events as a *guthiar*'s death. If a *guthi* possesses capital, one of the *guthiar* will act as treasurer. Every feast or act of worship to be performed by the *guthiar* as a joint enterprise is preceded by a meeting at which the contributions and the estimated expenses are discussed. Usually the celebration involves a sacrificial rite in a temple, and on all such occasions the services of a Guwaju priest are required. These can be dispensed with only if the *puja* takes place in the house of one of the *guthiar*, in which case the oldest man of the host's household acts as priest.

At the feast, which follows every act of *guthi*-worship, the *guthiar* sit in one line, with the *thakali* in the place of honour, and to his left the other *guthiar* in order of seniority. In the larger *guthi* sixteen *guthiar* are appointed as servers of food and drink, and this task of serving at *guthi*-feasts is undertaken in rotation by all the *guthiar*.

Every member of a *guthiar*'s household is an associate member of the *guthi*, and in the *guthiar*'s absence can represent the head of the household at the *puja* and subsequent feast. On a *guthiar*'s death his place is automatically taken by his successor as the head of his household. Grown-up sons who leave the parental home and set up households of their own during their father's life-time, have the option of joining as full members the *guthi* of which they have been associate members, or of severing their connection with the group. Though they have an undisputed right of admission to full *guthi* membership, they may be required to pay an entrance fee.

Persons lacking hereditary membership rights must be proposed at a full meeting of the *guthi* and must be elected by a unanimous vote, even one dissenting vote being sufficient to bar admittance. Resignation from optional *guthi* is possible at all times.

¹The sections of a house divided into separate dwellings are also referred to as '*kovo*'. The term as applied to an elementary family, not necessarily separated from the joint family, reminds one of the Chinese *fang* which means literally 'apartment', but serves also to describe a unit consisting of a married son, his wife, and their children; i.e. 'a family in posse, which will become an actual family on partition'. (H. McAleavy, 'Chinese Customary Law in the Light of Japanese Scholarship', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 1955, Vol. XVII. p. 545.)

A *guthi* formed for the sake of economic co-operation is known as *manka guthi*. The *guthiar* of a *manka guthi* are committed not only to help with the field work of other *guthi* members, but also to render them effective economic assistance in times of emergency. A *guthi*-member falling ill, for instance, may rely on the *thakali* of his *manka guthi* to organize urgent work on his fields and to assist in other practical ways. *Guthi*-members are also expected to render each other assistance in the arrangement of weddings and other domestic celebrations.

Ideally all the members of a *guthi* should belong to the same caste, and some of my informants stated emphatically that men of different castes could not belong to the same *guthi*. But exceptions to this rule seem to be fairly frequent. For instance, if there is a single Sheshyo family in a Jyapu village, it may be convenient for the Sheshyo householder to join a *manka guthi*, the other members of which are Jyapus, though his caste rules do not permit him to interdine with his fellow-*guthiar*.

Discipline within a voluntary *guthi* is maintained by a system of fines to be paid into *guthi*-funds. A *guthiar* guilty of inexcused absence from *guthi*-worship, from a business meeting of the *guthi*, or from the funeral of a fellow-*guthiar* is fined, but the non-attendance at a wedding in the house of a *guthi*-member, though regarded as discourteous, does not evoke similar sanctions.

The punishment of caste offences, such as a breach of commensal rules resulting in ritual pollution, is usually left to the jurisdiction of the offender's *digu puja guthi*, but once a man has been expelled from his *digu puja guthi* because of the loss of caste status, he is no longer acceptable to the members of the various voluntary *guthi* to which he may belong.

Membership of one *guthi* does not exclude adherence to other *guthi* directed towards different purposes, and some Newars belong to as many as thirty voluntary associations.

While the collaboration of the members of a *guthi* continues normally throughout life, there are co-operative associations of a more temporary nature, and these are called *bola* (Newari) or *parma* (Nepali). A *bola* is a group of people who have agreed to help each other with their agricultural work. This commitment extends usually only for one year and *bola* have no recognized leader comparable to the *thakali* of a *guthi*. The work to be done is distributed by mutual agreement, and the *bola*-members, whose number seldom exceeds twenty, may divide into several gangs. Most Newar cultivators are members of a *bola*, and in villages where they live side by side with Brahman or Chettri farmers it is not unusual for *bola* to comprise members of several communities. A *bola*-gang working on the field of one of the members is provided with a mid-day meal by the field-owner, and if there are non-Newars in the gang, they receive uncooked food which they prepare for themselves. Apart from working in rotation on the land of its members, a *bola* may work for wages on the fields of non-members. In such a case the field-owner employing the *bola* pays for the work in cash, and this is distributed among the members of the gang. Whereas Brahmans, Chetris, and other non-Newar cultivators may be drawn into this system of mutual assistance and join a *bola* on equal terms with Newars, they can never be members of a *guthi*, which is an institution peculiar to the Newars.

INTER-CASTE MOBILITY

The stability of Newar society, which two centuries of political subjection have hardly affected, is based on the firm and elaborate organization of the individual castes. Sub-divided into such residential units as *baha* or *sah*, each of which in turn comprises numerous lineages, these castes are closely integrated social entities. Ideally they are endogamous, but whereas in India the endogamy of caste and sub-caste is one of the immutable features of the Hindu social system, in Nepal there is customary provision for the mobility of individuals across

caste-lines. Breaches of the rule of caste-endogamy are not infrequent, and *varna sankara*, the mixture of castes which elsewhere is anathema to orthodox Hindu sentiment, does not give rise to the same measure of disapproval among Newars, who, it would seem, have always allowed for marital unions between members of different castes. Their tolerant attitude towards inter-caste marriages is due partly, no doubt, to the influence of Buddhist social principles, and partly to a concept of marriage fundamentally different from that prevailing among the higher Hindu castes of India. To the Newar – and particularly the Buddhist Newar – marriage is not a sacred and indissoluble union, but an association which either side can terminate at will. Though in recent years the incidence of divorce seems to be on the decline, and some of the Hindu Newars of high social status have come to view divorce with strong disfavour, in theory the remarriage of both divorcees and widows is entirely respectable, and even the second marriage of a woman may be celebrated with full rites.

A union between members of different castes, on the other hand, cannot be solemnized with the full wedding ritual. The bride enters her future husband's house without much formality, members of his family offer her betel, and she greets them by bowing to each in turn. No dowry is given, and there is no religious rite performed by a priest. The position of the new bride in her husband's household depends on the social distance which separates their respective castes. A Bare girl married to a Guwaju enjoys a status virtually equal to that of a wife born in the Guwaju caste, and her children are recognized as Guwaju. But a girl of Jyapu caste marrying a Guwaju or Bare may not enter the family kitchen, and if the husband is to retain his caste-status he may not accept boiled rice at her hands. A Guwaju girl, however, marrying a Jyapu man cannot by any expedient, such as abstention from interdining, avoid a loss of status. Both she and her children are classed as Jyapu.

The provision which allows a man married to a woman of inferior rank to retain his own caste status does not apply, however, to unions between men of high caste and untouchable women. A Guwaju or Sheshyo living with a Butcher or Sweeper girl will be expelled from his own caste, and in order to avoid living in a social vacuum, he may seek admittance to his wife's community, which he can gain by feasting her caste fellows. At the time of my stay in Kathmandu there were three Guwaju men who had joined the community of Untouchables under such circumstances.

It is only in cases of great social distance between husband and wife that the person of higher caste sinks to the level of his or her marital partner. In general, Newar society allows for a method of social mobility whereby men no less than women can gain in status through marriage with a person of higher caste. A woman married to a man of a caste or sub-caste ranking in the hierarchical order one or two grades below her own caste maintains her natal status, and her social standing can be passed on to her children. This type of hypogamy, known by the Newari term *tha wanegu* ('to go up') and the even more expressive Nepali term *sidhi charnu* ('climbing the ladder'), is particularly prevalent among the Sheshyos, the caste sub-divided into Charthari, Panchthari, and Chhathari (i.e. Grades Four, Five, and Six). The endeavour of every Sheshyo is to rise in status, and this can be achieved by marrying a girl of a grade superior to his own. A rich Sheshyo of 'Grade Four', for instance, may be able to marry a girl of 'Grade Five', and their children, if supported by wealth, may be successful in claiming 'Grade Five' status and may themselves marry into a 'Grade Six' family, and thus rise to the highest level of Sheshyo society.

This principle operates also at intercaste level and instances are known of Jyapus marrying Sheshyo girls of 'Grade Four', and obtaining thereby Sheshyo status for their children. Such 'climbing the ladder' is facilitated by the differential status of urban and rural society. Prosperous city-dwellers sometimes succeed in marrying country girls of a caste status higher than their own, because the prestige of the town society of the Valley

compensates to some extent for a lower status in the caste hierarchy. This practice goes far beyond the hypergamy prevalent among such Indian populations as the Rajputs, where the status of a patrilineage cannot be improved by marriage with women of higher status. Moreover, there is customary provision not only for intermarriage between different Newar castes, but even between Newars and other ethnic groups. Today the Newars dwell side by side with Nepali-speaking Brahmans and Chetris, and whereas in India, the traditional homeland of these communities, proximity and economic interdependence have not led to any significant rate of inter-caste unions, in Nepal marriages of Newars with Brahmans and Chetris are by no means infrequent.

The social and ritual status of the offspring of such unions is dependent on the relative caste-status of the parents. The children of a Sheshyo married to a Chetri girl of superior status will be accepted as fully privileged members of the father's caste, but the children of a high-ranking Sheshyo man and a girl of low and doubtful Chetri origin may not be granted commensal privileges by their father's caste-fellows, and will lack a definite social and ritual position in Newar society. They may use the father's clan-name, but, precluded from inheriting membership in a *digu puja guthi*, they have no recognized status in any of the ritual units so important in Newar life. When they reach marriageable age attempts may be made to obtain for them a partner marriage with whom will secure them a place in society. The Newar idea that social status emanates not only from men, but is also vested in women, who can to a certain degree confer it on the men they marry and the children they bear, facilitates the absorption of such persons into a Newar caste.

The position of the children of a Newar girl married to a Chetri man is determined by the application of similar principles. If the wife is of good Sheshyo caste, the children will be accepted as Chetris of the father's status, but if the woman comes from one of the lower Newar castes her children will be regarded neither as Chetris nor as Newars, but will be described as Khattris, a designation applied to a number of groups resulting from mixed marriages of this type.

The children of a Brahman father and a Newar mother normally rank as Khattris, but if the circumstances warrant, they can be absorbed into their mother's caste and thus become Newars. While a good many Brahmans live with Newar women, the marriage of a Brahman girl with a Newar is against the law of the State, which ever since the Gurkha conquest has upheld many of the laws of orthodox Hinduism.¹ No concrete case of such a marriage has come to my notice, but my Newar informants were of the opinion that should such a marriage occur the children would be accorded the status of full members of the father's Newar caste.

It appears that Newars, Brahmans, and Chetris, though distinct in language and tradition, nevertheless constitute a hierarchically organized inter-ethnic society within which individuals enjoy a considerable mobility. Populations such as Tamangs and Sherpas, on the other hand, are regarded as standing outside this wide circle of social relations. If a Newar consorts with a Tamang or Sherpa girl, the children of such a union are not reckoned as Khatri, but are considered as Sherpas or Tamangs respectively. To these communities they are acceptable, but there seems to be no possibility – not even by the expedient of creating a new caste comparable to Khatri or Urhä – of integrating them into the wider society of the Nepal Valley and the Newar towns.

The rejection of Sherpas and Tamangs as unsuitable for integration into the valley society is all the more significant as both these tribes are Buddhists. While Newars resident

¹Certain breaches of caste-rules, particularly those involving the higher Hindu castes, are considered criminal offences and are punished by the state courts. With the end of the Rana régime, a change in the official attitude to caste-offences seems to have set in, but in the case of the recent elopement of a young Brahman with an untouchable girl, both were arrested by the police and a heavy fine had to be paid before they were released from prison.

in Tibet are in the habit of marrying Tibetan wives, and the Sherpas freely intermarry with Tibetan immigrants, there are no social adjustments which provide for marital unions between Buddhist Newars and Sherpas. How are we to interpret this apparent inconsistency? It would seem that Hindu ideas of ritual purity have pervaded the entire community of the Newars resident in Nepal to such an extent that social relations are considered possible only with those who adhere to the same principles of ritual purity and pollution, and can consequently be fitted into a hierarchical order interlocking with that of Newar caste-society.

CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing analysis of certain aspects of Newar caste structure emerge several principles that operate at all levels of society. The first of these is the residential character of social units. The Newar of the Valley views social relationships against a background of clearly defined spatial entities. He sees in the precincts of his town the historic limits to the spread of patrilineal exogamous descent groups and considers the citizens of other towns as members of an out-group, even if they should bear a clan-name identical with his own. Diversity of traditional residence precludes in all such cases even the fiction of common descent and hence an extension of exogamous units across town boundaries. A modification of the residential principle becomes apparent, however, in the case of those recent settlers outside the Valley who maintain their connection with their ancestral *baha* or *sah*. In the internal organization of the individual castes, it is again the residential principle which underlies the structure of the social units. *Baha*, *noni*, *sah*, and *phuki* are exogamous groups based not only on patrilineal descent, but also on a traditional link with a specific place of residence and worship.

The second principle is the over-ruling importance of seniority according to birth order in the determination of social precedence and ritual status. Succession to ritual and social office is regulated by reference to a membership-roll which is maintained strictly according to the age of the members. The only exception to this principle is the election of certain caste-headmen, such as the *mu-koji* of the Sāmis, but even these are elected from among a number of dignitaries who owe their position as members of the caste-council to seniority by birth order within segments of the caste. There is today among the Newars no hereditary office which passes in unilineal succession from father to son.¹

The third principle is the allocation of public duties according to a rigid system of rotation. Position on a membership-roll determines the sequence in which such duties pass from one member of a social unit to the other, and the principle of rotation guarantees an equitable distribution of obligations and privileges.

A characteristic feature of all Newar castes is the ramification into a large number of small and closely knit social units. The members of such groups as *noni* or *phuki* are bound together by an inescapable obligation to co-operate in numerous ritual enterprises, and the framework of interlocking social units into which every Newar is born is exceptionally rigid and comprehensive. Only constant co-operation with the members of all these groups enables a man to gain prestige, and the continued approval of his caste-fellows is an essential condition for maintaining both inherited and achieved status.

Preoccupation with the maintenance of personal status results in a meticulous avoidance of all possible sources of pollution. Rather than risk ritual contamination the members of a kin-group will sever their relations with a kinsman suspected of having jeopardized his

¹Ideas of succession from father to eldest son, derived presumably from Rajput sources, seem to have influenced the laws of succession adhered to by the Malla kings, whose titles and privileges passed to their own sons. Among other communities of Nepal too we find two systems of succession operating at different levels; while succession to the throne of the Gurkha kings has always been from father to son according to the law of primogeniture, the hereditary Rana prime ministers of Nepal followed the principle of succession by seniority according to birth order within the lineage.

caste status. Such action is not only an expression of disapproval of a breach of the caste-code; it is above all a precautionary measure aimed at safeguarding their own status. Conformity is one of the principal values of Newar society, and in theory only the man who conforms can maintain his position in *guthi* and caste.

Apparently inconsistent with this high valuation of conformity is the tolerant attitude adopted towards marital and semi-marital unions between members of two normally endogamous groups, and the mobility of individuals across the boundaries of castes or sub-castes. While for the orthodox Hindu of Northern India there is no socially permitted alternative to marriage within his own caste, the Newar can conclude a formal or informal union with a woman of lower, though not of untouchable, caste without necessarily endangering his position in his own caste-society. Provided always that the status-difference of the partners is not too great, this tolerant attitude applies even to women marrying beneath their rank, and unions of this type are indeed the main operative device in the process of social climbing.

Two fundamental concepts are involved in this relaxation of the rules of caste-endogamy: the idea that sexual congress does not affect caste-status to the same extent as the acceptance of ritually relevant food, i.e. boiled rice; and the idea that social status is transmittable in the female as well as in the male line, so that a woman of superior status marrying a man of lower rank may confer her status on her children and, in certain cases, may raise the status of her partner to her own social level. These concepts are closely linked with an attitude to marriage very different from that of the orthodox Hindu. The Newar girl who as a child is married to a *bel* fruit, and whose ritual status as a married woman does not therefore depend on any subsequent marriage, is free to dissolve the ties of matrimony by the simple act of giving back the betel nuts she received as a bride during the wedding rites. In the case of a husband's early death, she may, by placing the betel nuts on the bier near the corpse and returning to her parental house, escape the obligation of observing a widow's mourning and gain the right to remarry whenever she chooses to do so. This freedom of Newar women to enter, at least in theory, into any number of marriages suggests that the wedding-rites and a woman's sexual relations with a man, be he her first or a subsequent husband, do not permanently alter her ritual and social status.

While in the toleration of inter-caste and inter-ethnic unions the Newars do not go as far as the purely Buddhist populations of Nepal, such as Sherpas and Tamangs, they concede to the individual a degree of freedom in the choice of sexual partners characteristic of Buddhist rather than of Hindu societies. If there have been changes in social attitudes during the two centuries of Gurkha rule, they have almost certainly been towards a tightening of the rules of caste-endogamy, and I believe we should err if we interpreted the tolerant attitude towards inter-caste and inter-ethnic unions as symptomatic of an incipient breakdown of the caste system.

If the elasticity of attitude towards marital unions conflicting with the accepted norms is not a modern development, how is such a 'looseness' compatible with the rigidity of the system of closely knit units such as *phuki* or *sah*, and with the high value set on conformity? In the analysis of another Buddhist society, namely that of Ceylon, Bryce F. Ryan (1954, p. 199) has defined the conditions under which a society, its institutions, and consequently the behaviour of the participants, may be termed 'loosely structured'; one of the characteristic conditions is, according to this definition, that 'behaviour which goes beyond the acknowledged sphere of the normative is condoned or tolerated without the need for rationalization to competing or conflicting norms except in so far as the value of tolerance may be considered normative'. While this criterion seems to apply to Newar society, the next criterion formulated by Ryan is inapplicable to the situation as we find it among the Newars. According to this criterion a society is 'loosely structured' when 'values of group

organization, formality, permanence, durability, and solidarity are undeveloped, giving group life the character of informal, unstable, and ill-defined associations in which group roles are subordinated to the individual ends of the participants'. No part of this characterization is valid for Newar society, where elaborately structured units form a pattern more complex than that of Hindu society in most parts of India.

Our problem, then, is to reconcile the elaborateness of structure and the exacting demands of Newar society on the resources and energies of its individual members with the tolerance shown to deviants and the latitude allowed to individuals in a sphere of life where Indian caste-societies impose severe restrictions on individual choice. With the limited data at present available it is not possible to resolve this apparent inconsistency and a great deal of fieldwork will have to be done before we can advance an hypothesis which accounts adequately for the conflicting trends in Newar social attitudes. What is particularly required is a detailed and quantitative study of cases of non-conformity, such as inter-caste marriages, and the way in which the offspring of such marriages find a place in the complicated system of *guthi* and local units.

Even the fragmentary material discussed in this paper indicates the importance of Newar culture for the student of Asian social systems. For conditions in Nepal, not only among the Newars, but also among the Nepali-speaking Hindu communities, point to the conclusion that the rigid endogamy of individual castes and sub-castes, considered so often as the main pivot of the Hindu caste-system, is not an essential and immutable feature of all caste societies.

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